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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Fourteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 14th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 8 May 1996, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. ALSTON

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS:

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (continued)

Initial report of Guatemala (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS:

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Guatemala (continued) (E/1990/5/Add.24; E/C.12/1995/LQ.9; HRI/CORE/1/Add.47)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Arranz Sanz, Mr. Mazariegos and Mr. Díaz-Duque (Guatemala) took places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. ARRANZ SANZ (Guatemala), replying to questions regarding Guatemala's implementation of the provisions of human rights instruments, said that article 46 of the Constitution established the precedence of international law over internal law. There was no precedent for the direct invocation of provisions of international treaties in Guatemalan courts. However, the constitutionality of articles 232-235 of the Penal Code governing adultery and concubinage had recently been challenged before the Court of Constitutionality on the grounds that they violated provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, and the American Convention on Human Rights, to all of which Guatemala was a party. The Court, upholding the constitutional pre-eminence of international treaties, had in fact ruled those articles unconstitutional.

3. Mr. MAZARIEGOS (Guatemala), referring to questions on gender equality and the participation of women in public life, said that women were still stereotypically regarded as a secondary, cheaper labour force, a fact which held back their advancement. According to the National Women's Office of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Guatemalan women had entered the various formal and informal sectors of the economy in greater numbers, although they were still expected to be exclusively responsible for child care and were most commonly employed, on an irregular and lower-paid basis than men, in domestic work.

4. In the public sector, very few women held decision-making administrative posts: yet according to official figures, currently about 14 per cent of the Congressional deputies were women, their numbers having risen from 1 deputy in the 1950s to 25 in the 1990s. In the 1994 Congressional elections, about 12.5 per cent of candidates and 7.5 per cent of the successful candidates had been women. One cabinet minister, two Supreme Court judges and the current president of the Court of Constitutionality were also women, and women constituted almost 10 per cent of all judges in the country. Four ambassadors were women, and women active in the field of human rights, like the Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú, had gained international recognition. Indigenous women, it should be noted, traditionally had a privileged status in Mayan culture, whose ancient social structures were still preserved in the indigenous communities, and they often held leadership positions in the struggle for equal rights.

5. In the private sector, more women held managerial posts, especially in the service sector; they were prominent in fields like teaching or accounting, and often active in human rights and peasants' rights groups and religious organizations. With women representing 40 per cent of university students, their numbers in responsible positions would only increase.

6. Mrs. BONOAN-DANDAN observed that, while the delegation had clearly gathered an impressive amount of statistics at very short notice, what interested the Committee was the quality of life of the ordinary woman in Guatemala. The Committee's concern was broader, with the basic equality of men and women, not merely with the participation of women in public life. What legal protection did women have, for instance, under the Civil Code, rather than the Penal Code, that would redress discrimination in the areas identified by the delegation in its replies?

7. Mr. MAZARIEGOS (Guatemala), recalling in that connection the amendments to the Labour Code outlined at an earlier meeting, said that the Presidential Commission for Coordinating Executive Policy in the field of Human Rights (COPREDEH), in conjunction with a former Human Rights Procurator, was preparing a new legal challenge to the constitutionality of articles 78-114 of the Civil Code, which contained provisions discriminating against women, a 1995 challenge having been dismissed for procedural reasons.

8. He also pointed out that 43 per cent of heads of household - traditionally a man's role - were women; they earned 40 per cent of household income.

9. Mr. ARRANZ SANZ (Guatemala) said that the inequality of women in Guatemala was not the result of his Government's policies but rather of cultural attitudes that discriminated against women. Through education, the Government was trying to transform such a way of thinking, prevalent among women as well, and to break down the idea of gender roles. There was no denying, however, that discrimination against women was still a contemporary problem. Family violence was also quite widespread, and the attitude of the police was a factor in the failure to combat it. Guatemala had a deeply Catholic culture, exalting the role of women as mothers and discouraging women from entering public life. That outlook was changing, but very slowly.

10. Mr. MAZARIEGOS (Guatemala), reviewing the legal framework for the measures the Government was taking to guarantee the equal rights of indigenous people, said that the Constitution prohibited discrimination on grounds of race, colour or ethnic origin, as did the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Racial Discrimination, to which Guatemala was a party. All citizens had equal rights under the law, and the law made no distinctions among citizens in any respect. Indigenous people were encouraged to participate in public administration, and a number of them, in fact, held high governmental, congressional and municipal posts.

11. Mr. GRISSA, observing that there was no country that did not now have good laws or constitutions, said that all countries nevertheless had a privileged and an underprivileged class. The question was where the abuses lay and what was being done to redress them. The Committee was interested not

in the good fortune of the privileged few who had risen to the top, but in the lot of the oppressed and underprivileged - the street children, displaced persons, those without education, the failures in society.

12. Mr. MAZARIEGOS (Guatemala) said that no specific statistics were available on the indigenous 50 per cent of the population, many of them underprivileged, because there was never any breakdown by race in official data. The Government was planning to review its policy on indigenous peoples in order to reduce their de facto inequalities in relation to the rest of the population and to remedy the undeniable racial discrimination that did exist. The aim was to encourage their participation in all aspects of national life. In 1995, a bill had been introduced in Congress to revise the Penal Code by making ethnic or racial discrimination on ethnic grounds a criminal offence.

13. The cultural and linguistic pluralism of indigenous Guatemalans unquestionably restricted their access to education. The Ministry of Education was trying to remove such obstacles and make preschool and primary school education more widely available to marginalize urban and rural children by offering bilingual and intercultural courses, and had succeeded in the past two years in enrolling 337,000 new pupils in the education system. At the same time, it was trying to combat prejudice and foster inter-ethnic tolerance by publicizing the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the various other relevant international instruments.

14. The human rights courses for government officials run by the Education Department of COPREDEH included the subject of racial discrimination. The Ministry of Education, for its part, had a regular programme for the teaching of solidarity and cultural understanding among indigenous boys and girls.

15. Mr. ADEKUOYE considered that the Government should begin to collect statistics that included a racial breakdown. The constant references to indigenous people surely meant that they had somehow been classified as such. It was clear from the information being provided that their status needed improvement.

16. In relation to violence against women, he wondered whether the discriminatory cultural attitudes made distinctions on the basis of class or of ethnicity.

17. Mr. ARRANZ SANZ (Guatemala) said his delegation had made it clear that de facto discrimination existed and that indigenous people had suffered from its consequences. There were various elements that defined those people: direct Mayan linguistic descent, a particular outlook on life, and self-identification. Indigenous people could also be identified by the physical characteristic of a dark brown mark on the skin at the base of the spinal column, which was typical of the purest Mayan descendants. Censuses took account of all such factors. The population of Guatemala was approximately 10.5 million, 48 per cent being indigenous and 52 per cent being of Spanish descent. The figures did not really tally with the rural/urban division - 40 per cent of the population lived in cities and 60 per cent in rural areas - but given the statistical margin of error, it was possible to speak of an approximate 50-50 split between indigenous people and people of Spanish descent.

18. Mr. MAZARIEGOS (Guatemala) provided information regarding labour rights. Article 42 of the Guatemalan Constitution guaranteed freedom to work, and recognized work both as a personal right and as a social obligation. There were also constitutionally-guaranteed minimum, irrenounceable standards regarding the right to free choice of work in satisfactory economic conditions guaranteeing the worker and his family a minimum standard of living, and recognizing the need for appropriate remuneration, limited hours of work, the right to organize and hold strikes, annual holidays and protection of women in the labour force. Although guaranteed in the Constitution, such rights had been developed and expanded in specific Congressional decrees. Employers were not allowed to make reference to race, sex or marital status when advertising jobs, and were also forbidden to dismiss women who were pregnant.

19. The minimum wage was established by means of a system of consultation with representatives of employers' and workers' organizations, and took account of the needs of workers and their families and of the economic situation of the undertakings concerned. Minimum wages were guaranteed by law, and sanctions were imposed if they were violated; cases were judged by a panel chaired by a civil servant from the Ministry of Labour and comprising two employers' representatives and two workers' representatives. The National Wages Commission was a technical and consultative body within the Ministry of Labour which defined and implemented general wages policy.

20. During the first 20 days of January the Ministry appointed workers' and employers' representatives to serve on minimum-wage committees for the rest of the year; the committees then fixed the minimum wages for the various activities within their remit. Basic wages in the public sector were established by agreement and following evaluation by joint committees of the quality, quantity and complexity of the activities concerned, with the help of a points system denoting the difficulty of the work undertaken.

21. The employment situation had been dealt with in the written reply to question 13 of the list of issues, but he wished to add that some 2.7 per cent of the economically-active population of Guatemala was unemployed, i.e. 80,000 people who were either out of work or seeking work for the first time. That figure had fallen from 4.6 per cent in 1980. The main problem of the Guatemalan labour market was the high level of underemployment. At present some 64 per cent of the economically-active population was underemployed; in 1980 that figure had been 55 per cent. There was no unemployment benefit, and a worker had to find a way of supporting himself and his family; that usually took the form of entry into the informal sector.

22. Control functions within the Ministry of Labour were performed by the General Labour Inspectorate, whose inspectors visited places of work and carried out on-the-spot investigations. They were required to establish whether there had been a violation of the Labour Code; if they found a problem in the employer-worker relationship, they brought the two sides together to ascertain what had gone wrong, usually in the presence of a labour judge. Inspectorates were being set up in all departments of the country.

23. Mr. AHMED complained that the Guatemalan delegation was merely giving a rehash of the country's Constitution and law. What happened in practice was another matter, and the subject of most of the criticism from members of the Committee.

24. The CHAIRPERSON said that the delegation was probably providing too much information of a purely formal nature. When the Committee had expressed concerns, it was for the delegation to address them - denying them, accepting them, and wherever possible explaining what the Government planned to do to deal with them. If it ignored the specific concerns of members, the Committee would be left with the assumption that they were justified.

25. Mr. TEXIER said his question had related to the very low rate of unemployment and how the figures were calculated when so many people worked in the informal sector. He had also asked what the statutory minimum wage enabled the worker to do. Was it sufficient to meet basic family requirements?

26. Mr. CRAUSU said it would also be legitimate for a delegation to state that no figures were available to answer specific concerns or that it was not in a position to check whether an allegation was true or not, but it would convey the Committee's concerns to the authorities in the country concerned and report back at a later stage. A delegation could not be expected to have all facts and figures at its fingertips.

27. Mr. ARRANZ SANZ (Guatemala) said the Committee should understand that when his delegation did not contradict what members had said, it meant that they had been correct. There was no denying that what often happened fell short of what was laid down in the country's Constitution and laws. Whenever the delegation did not have the information to provide an answer, it undertook to do so at a later stage.

28. The minimum wage was very much lower than the cost of a decent living standard and was not index-linked to inflation. The Guatemalan Human Rights Procurator had been correct when he had stated in his report of 1995, quoted by Mr. Ahmed, that cases existed of workers being paid less than the minimum wage.

29. Mr. MAZARIEGOS (Guatemala) said that under the Labour Code it was possible for children aged 14 or under to work, but a judge must be convinced that there was a need for the child to work, that the work was sufficiently light and suitable for a young person, and that the child's education was not being jeopardized as a result. Children usually worked in the countryside and at harvest time, when they accompanied their parents; the Ministry of Education was promoting a "mobile school" programme to ensure continuity of studies. The Ministry of Labour organized seminars to advise minors of their labour rights.

30. One question had referred to large-scale dismissals in the Guatemalan Ministry of Agriculture. There had indeed been a number of contract terminations in the Ministry earlier in the year, but his delegation had been told that they had been prompted by budgetary considerations. It was not a case of reprisals against workers because they had been exercising their

labour rights. The Labour Code established procedures for the settlement of disputes when the dispute was of an economic or social nature; when such a procedure was under way the employer was advised that he could not terminate a contract without the prior consent of the judge involved.

31. There was no obligation in Guatemalan legislation to establish specific standards of occupational safety and health; the law merely stated that there must be a safe and healthy working environment. It was subject to supervision by official inspectors.

32. The right to strike was fully enjoyed in Guatemala, both de jure and de facto. There were many strikes and frequent arbitration and conciliation procedures in both the public and the private sectors. There was a special law governing union membership of civil servants; the Constitution guaranteed them the right to strike, but their strike action was not allowed to affect the provision of essential public services. They were also forbidden to take part in party politics. A bill relating to civil servants' right to strike was currently being examined by Congress, and the Committee would be given a copy of it. The Guatemalan national police force had no trade union at present, but under the Labour Code it did have an ad hoc committee which had negotiated an agreement with the police authorities.

33. Mr. RATTRAY asked whether it was a fact that there could be no strike by agricultural workers at harvest time.

34. Mr. MARTINEZ (Guatemala) said it was true that, in accordance with the principle that the interest of society prevailed over the interest of the individual, the Labour Code prohibited strikes at harvest time, unless the crop was one that would not be affected by delay.

35. In response to the further questions about pensions, he said that as explained in the replies to the list of issues, Guatemala had three main pension schemes: the scheme for State workers, the scheme of the Guatemalan Social Security Institute (IGSS), and the schemes operated by a number of public and private institutions. In the State system, employees paid pension contributions on a graduated scale, ranging from 3 per cent of the base salary to 1% per cent of salaries of 10,000 quetzales and above; the Government contributed the same amount. In the case of the IGSS scheme, there were two types of contribution: one restricted to sickness and maternity benefit, which was 3 per cent of base pay, and another, which covered disability, old age and survivors' benefits, which was 4.5 per cent of base pay. It must be admitted that the total amount of the pension was very small. Since the base salary was already not enough to provide for a family, pensions were clearly inadequate.

36. Mrs. JIMENEZ BUTRAGUENO asked whether the pensions paid by the IGSS and by the State pension scheme were tied in any way to the minimum wage and whether an old-age pension was enough for a pensioner to live on. She also asked whether there was any relationship between the State system and the IGSS social security scheme. Which paid the better pension? Was a widow who went on working entitled to receive a survivor's benefit and could a widower receive a pension earned by his wife?

37. Mr. MAZARIEGOS (Guatemala) said that the amounts paid by the IGSS for disability, old age and survivors' pensions were calculated on the basis of tables established by the Institute, and could work out at less than the minimum wage. Since 1994, the minimum payable in the State scheme had been 300 quetzales. The IGSS and State schemes were completely independent of each other and the minimum and maximum contributions were different. Under the IGSS scheme, a worker contributed 4.5 per cent of his base pay, from a minimum of 50 quetzales to a maximum of about 100 quetzales. In the State scheme, workers' contributions ranged from 9 to 15 per cent of earnings, leading to a minimum pension of 300 quetzales and a maximum of 2,000 quetzales. Under that scheme, the widow of a retiree received 100 per cent of the amount due to him, unless there were dependent children, in which case she received 50 per cent and the children 50 per cent. Under the IGSS scheme, the widow received as a survivors' benefit 50 per cent of the retirement pension that would have gone to her husband. In both schemes, a widow who continued to work could not collect a pension. A women who continued to work for the State could not collect a pension for herself but she could receive an allowance for the children. When she did retire, she could choose between her own pension and that of her husband. Regulations governing widowers' pensions had been adopted in 1988.

38. Concern had been expressed that there were no social security arrangements for domestic workers, who did not contribute to any scheme. For the purpose of calculating any sick or severance pay due to a domestic worker, it was assumed that 30 per cent of wages was in the form of food and housing. In response to the questions asked about "de facto" marriages, he said that such common-law marriages could be declared by either party or by both, for purposes of registration, and that the legal effects of a registered common-law marriage were exactly the same as those of a civil marriage, including pension entitlements.

39. Mr. APPANZ SANZ (Guatemala) said that in the questions asked in connection with article 12 (right to health), specific reference had been made to cholera and dengue. He was glad to report that there had been a steep decline in the incidence of cholera since 1993, with the earlier epidemic giving way to sporadic outbreaks. Major educational campaigns had been carried out in the capital and the provinces to promote food safety and general hygiene, and it was the Government's intention to maintain progress towards the eradication of cholera and diarrhoeal diseases. One important advance of 1995 had been the establishment of laboratories to produce oral rehydration salts, in preparation for any major outbreak of diarrhoea, a project which had received technical and financial support from USAID.

40. In the case of dengue, priority attention was being given to those departments in which it was most widespread. Treatment was focused on the disease itself and on the carrier. A new insect vector of the disease had been discovered in one department and measures had already been taken to eradicate it. In order to protect the environment, the Ministry of Health had decided not to engage in mass spraying of insecticides. While classical dengue fever continued to exist, the measures taken had reduced cases of haemorrhagic dengue to only three or four in the past year.

41. With regard to general health policy, he emphasized that, under the new agreement between the Government and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), the programmes of the Ministry of Health would henceforth concentrate on prevention. Under the agreement, the Government undertook to maintain the eradication of poliomyelitis and to achieve the eradication of measles by the year 2000. The other childhood diseases would be strictly controlled through an intensive campaign of immunization.

42. Attention had been drawn to the sharp differences in health services between the capital and the provinces. Under the new agreement, the Government undertook to extend access to health services to the whole of the Guatemalan population. Referring to health infrastructure, he said that, at the beginning of 1995, there had been 37 public hospitals in the whole of Guatemala, 33 health centres, and a further 1,200 or so less well-equipped centres. He agreed that facilities were very limited in the light of the population's needs. The relative concentration of hospital beds, both public and private, in the capital was a matter of particular concern.

43. Mr. TEXIER said that he had been very struck by the absence of a national health policy and the decline in health expenditure in relation to GNP recorded in paras. 86 and 87 of the report. He was therefore particularly glad to hear of the new agreement, which recognized the need to reform the health sector and gave the Ministry of Health the task of formulating policies that would provide comprehensive health services for all. He looked forward to receiving Guatemala's next report, in a few years' time, outlining the results achieved by that new departure.

44. Mrs. JIMENEZ BUTRAGUENO asked whether there were any health services for the elderly.

45. Mr. AHMED said that the new agreement also contained provisions recognizing the need for a housing policy and an undertaking by the Government to promote access to housing by the poor. Much needed to be done in that sector and he hoped that the Government's next report would also contain good news about housing.

46. Mr. ARRANZ SANZ (Guatemala) said that the Government's pledges were serious with regard to both health and housing. In the case of the latter, the Government had undertaken to spend 1.7 per cent of tax revenue on the provision of housing as from 1997. There were no special services for the elderly but they had the same access to the regular services as the rest of the population. Children and the elderly were of course the most vulnerable to the current deficiencies in the system, but persons over the age of 60 constituted only 5 per cent of the population, 60 per cent of whom were under the age of 18.

47. Mr. MAZARIEGOS (Guatemala) said in reply to the question about assistance to widows and orphans who were victims of the internal conflict that a special programme of government assistance existed, administered by the Office of the President in association with the First Lady's special Secretariat for Social Work. Most of the widows concerned were indigenous women living in extreme poverty. Within the country, nine departments had been identified as having priority for assistance, which took the form of support in the areas of health

and education and help in setting up small businesses. The aim was to promote overall development by enhancing the participation of women in the economic and social life of their communities. In 1995, technical and financial assistance had been provided to 150 groups, comprising 5,245 widows and 9,970 orphans, in the various departments. More than 3.5 million quetzales had been invested by the programme, which had its own Executive Secretary and a permanent staff stationed in the provinces and the capital.

48. Under the earlier agreement on human rights, the Government had undertaken to rehabilitate and assist victims of human rights violations through the various social funds already identified in the report. Congress was currently studying a bill put forward by a member who was a well-known human rights activist, seeking to create a special government body to rehabilitate and assist persons whose human rights had been violated, and in particular victims of the internal armed conflict.

49. Mr. ARRANZ SANZ (Guatemala) said in reply to Mr. Grissa on article 11 that "illegal settlements" were houses or shacks built by persons trespassing on private property.

50. Mrs. BONOAN-DANDAN repeated her earlier question. What new measures would ensure that the proposed bill on domestic violence would be implemented more effectively than past legislation? She had not yet received a satisfactory answer from the delegation.

51. Mr. ARRANZ SANZ (Guatemala) said he could not recall the details of that particular bill, but a distinguished group of female lawyers was currently studying means of redrafting present legislation and incorporating within the Constitution the criteria set out in the various international conventions ratified by Guatemala. Well aware of the gravity of the problem, his Government had presented a plan to the Human Rights Commission for achieving change through public information campaigns. Research would be conducted into the cultural and other causes of the problem, with a view to increasing awareness of the issue of domestic violence and respect for human rights among the various social groups and public, administrative and legal bodies. Unfortunately, no attention was currently being devoted in law faculties to the International Covenants on Human Rights. Special services were, however, being created to provide appropriate medical, legal and psychological assistance to the victims of aggression, as were refuges for young people, homes for battered women and a Commission for Women. Over the past two years, throughout the Republic, pilot units offering legal and other advice had been established to encourage women to denounce the perpetrators of violence against them. Traditional values were often to blame. They must be changed for a culture of equality and mutual respect to reign in Guatemala.

52. In reply to Mr. Adekuoye's query, he explained that CONALFA was the National Committee for Literacy Training set up by the Ministry of Education; it was working on a broad, informal literacy training programme for adults and children not attending school. More information could be provided if required.

53. Religious education was not compulsory in State schools, although it could be requested by a group of parents or students. Certain days of the

year were devoted to religious festivities (mostly masses or evangelical services), but nobody was obliged to participate. The small number of Jehovah's Witnesses were excused from attending school on certain religious holidays. The Government attempted to cater for the sensitivities of all sects.

54. Teachers earned a monthly salary of approximately 1,200 quetzales, admittedly less than civil servants. They were, however, awarded a 20 per cent rise every five years. Teachers had refused to be governed by the civil servant wage law, which ensured a minimum wage of 2,500 quetzales. They felt their own Decree (No. 1485) conferred better rights for it presupposed tenure for life, a guarantee which they valued highly. Supply teachers (or "taxi" teachers as they were known in Guatemala) were not treated as well. Teachers did, however, receive excellent pensions after 30 years in the profession, amounting to 100 per cent of their last salary. That served as an incentive to enter the profession.

55. A bilingual school system was now in place. In regions where the majority spoke an indigenous language, schooling was provided in that language. Spanish was introduced at a later stage in the pupil's education in order to facilitate social mobility and promotion. Guatemala had 11 different linguistic groups and had recently been awarded a prize by UNESCO for its language training methodology.

56. In 1995, 37 per cent of the population had been found to be illiterate. Some estimates put the figure at 48 per cent. Illiteracy was, however, declining at an annual rate of 12.5 per cent. If the current rate was maintained, only 22 per cent of the population would be illiterate by the year 2000. One per cent of the national budget was devoted to CONALFA, a very significant level of funding, although the project had never actually received that amount. CONALFA contracted work to NGOs in the various departments and regions. In 1994, 15,000 men and 10,000 women had attended weekend and night classes for adults at "accelerated primary" level over a three-year period. There were fewer such opportunities in the more remote areas.

57. In 1994, the schooling system had covered 68.2 per cent of 7 to 12-year-olds ("primary" level), with a coverage of 85 per cent in the metropolitan area and 77 per cent in adjacent regions. "Basic" level education for 13 to 15-year-olds only covered 20 per cent of that age group, while "diversified" education for the final two or three years of schooling only reached 10.9 per cent. There was thus a deficit in coverage at secondary level ("basic" and "diversified"). Guatemala had 2,400 primary-level establishments and 1,600 establishments providing "general cultural education". Few establishments catered for "diversified" education.

58. A special programme for promoting the education of girls had been initiated, with the slogan "An educated girl grows up to be a woman able to assist in development". Women had many burdens to shoulder. If a mother had been well educated as a girl, she would be better able to care for her family's health, provide the correct diet and encourage school attendance by her children.

59. The Government recognized the need to harmonize the various levels of schooling and was following the Colombian model, among others. In January 1996, a new Government had come to power and one of its aims was to increase educational coverage of the population and encourage decentralization of the education system. Pre-primary coverage for 5 to 6-year-olds was to be increased from 60 per cent to 80 per cent, and primary education for 7 to 14-year-olds from 60 per cent to 95 per cent. The Government also aimed to reduce the high numbers of pupils repeating a year to just 10 per cent. The present high level was mainly due to social and family problems. Pupils were often forced to travel great distances to get to school. If a family had two or three children, the father would often promise the teacher he would send one child to school provided he could keep the others at home to help the family. The Government's target was a school attendance and literacy rate of 80 per cent. Extracurricular distance-learning projects were being organized with the help of Spain and Mexico, which had been making televised educational programmes available at the "basic" level. The Ministry of Education was currently implementing a school refurbishment programme and providing all schools at primary and pre-primary levels with biscuits and milk, so that school would be perceived as a place where additional food could be obtained in return for attendance.

60. The Government's target was 100 per cent bilingual training for teachers at all levels, since teachers could not be expected to provide the required language teaching unless they were bilingual themselves. Language training and multicultural programmes would be expanded to include all linguistic groups. In future, 60 per cent of all schools would be taught Mayan language and culture, and all children, irrespective of ethnic origin, would learn about shared values between the various cultures with a view to promoting cultural understanding among adolescents. The education system, which was at present overly academic, was to be attuned more closely to the job market.

61. On Mr. Rattray's question concerning paragraph 125 of the report (E/1990/5/Add.24), his delegation stressed that the Government did not endeavour to impose European culture upon indigenous groups. Guatemala sought a greater degree of idiosyncrasy with a view to promoting mutual understanding and the coexistence of diverse cultures. The fruits of such policies would be seen in the future.

62. Mr. TEXIER recalled that the Government had earlier admitted that its obligations under the Covenant with regard to free or compulsory primary education for all had not been respected. However, the requirements under article 14 had now been met by the agreement signed two days previously between the Government and the URNG. He was pleased to note that the planned target date for incorporating all school-age children in at least three years of primary education was the year 2000 and that the Government had pledged to increase the literacy rate of the population to 70 per cent. The implementation of such a laudable plan would require both political will and funding. He looked forward to receiving a progress report in a few years' time, and remarked that the targets mentioned by the delegation had been even more ambitious than those pledged in the agreement.

63. Mr. ARRANZ SANZ (Guatemala) agreed that the Government's commitment represented a colossal undertaking, but it was important to aim high.

64. With regard to drugs, he wished to point out that Guatemala's problem was not one of drug consumption, but of drug trafficking to the United States and other countries. It was true that some street children did consume drugs, but that basically only amounted to glue-sniffing. They were not addicted to it; they merely sniffed glue in order to forget their hunger.

65. In thanking the Committee, he assured it that the Government had been both honest and sincere and that it was well aware of the enormity of the challenge which lay ahead. He stressed Guatemala's willingness to monitor compliance with the Covenant and understood that it would need to produce rapid results; otherwise international help would not be forthcoming. Without assistance, however, Guatemala would not be able to achieve the necessary results. That was a vicious circle which the new Government hoped to break.

66. Mr. DIAZ-DUQUE (Guatemala) also expressed thanks for the Committee's interest and constructive criticism and recalled the recently-ended fifty-second session of the Commission on Human Rights, which had been characterized by a new optimism. Although much remained to be done, even speakers not connected with the Government had agreed that change was in the air and that some improvements had already been made. He had urged national NGOs to do their utmost to ensure that human rights were respected. Guatemala hoped one day to become an example for other democracies.

67. The CHAIRPERSON agreed that the situation in Guatemala was unique for a number of reasons and thanked the delegation for its willingness to engage in dialogue.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.